



CHRIST'S PRESENCE THE SUPPORT OF FAITH.

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL,

ON SUNDAY, MAY 3, 1846.

BY

HENRY EDWARD MANNING, M.A.,

ARCHDEACON OF CHICHESTER.

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AT the Annual General Court of the Governors and Guardians of the Foundling Hospital, held on Wednesday the 12th May, 1846, it was

“ RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

“ That the cordial thanks of this Court be presented to the Venerable the Archdeacon MANNING, for his able, impressive, and appropriate Sermon preached in the Chapel of this Hospital on Sunday morning last.

“ This Court being of opinion that the very lucid exposition of the designs and practice of the charity, put forth in the Sermon of Archdeacon MANNING, is eminently calculated to support its character, and to increase its means of usefulness,

“ RESOLVED,

“ That Archdeacon MANNING be requested to favour the Committee with a copy thereof, in order to its being printed and circulated by them.”

S E R M O N,

&c., &c.

ST. JOHN, xxi., 4.

When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

THIS is the third time that our Lord appeared in these forty days to his disciples, that is, to the disciples gathered together. He had already appeared before them not less than six times; that is, to Mary Magdalene first, on the morning of the resurrection, to the women returning from the tomb, to St. Peter when he was alone, to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, to the ten disciples when Thomas was not with them, and after eight days, to the eleven when Thomas was there.

But to His disciples as a body He appeared only at these two last times, and this was the third. No longer in Jerusalem; but in Galilee. He had bidden them go into Galilee; they went at His bidding. They were waiting, and wondering whither He was gone—when He would return. Their happiness of following Him and hanging on His words, their work of preaching in His name, was over. As yet He had given them no new charge, no new work to do for Him. All seemed at an end.

The expectation of the kingdom, and of the twelve thrones on which they should sit with Him, seemed to have faded away. What now remained to them but to go back to the lowly toil in which He had found them at the first—to their boats and to their nets, once more to take the pure creatures over which God has given man dominion?

“There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? they answered Him, No. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved, saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.” As John outstripped Peter in running to the tomb, so he outstripped him in seeing now. “When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea.” As Peter first went into the sepulchre, so he first reached the presence of the Lord. “And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred

cubits), dragging the net with fishes. As soon, then, as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead*.”

There is something singularly touching and beautiful in this mysterious visitation. And it is full of instruction to us.

I. See, then, first, how He was teaching them to live by faith, and not any longer by sight. While He was yet with them, all their thoughts centred in Him. Their eyes limited their faith to His visible presence; they heard His words, and saw His mighty works; they conversed with Him, and were familiar with his personal fellowship. Their love bound them down to the place where He stood before them. But now they were to “see greater things than these.” The time was come when all narrow locality was to pass into an universal presence; when the mystery of God manifest in the flesh should unfold

* St. John xxi., 2—14.

itself into the mystery of the Incarnate Word present in the Holy Ghost. Therefore He conveyed Himself away: for forty days He came and went, without token or harbinger, suddenly appearing and suddenly departing again, to keep them ever on the watch, ever conscious of His presence when He should be no longer seen. When He came to them, therefore, He no more walked upon the waters as He had done heretofore, nor went up into the ship. He stood afar off upon the shore. They were upon the flood, He upon the strand, in type, as it were, of the change that had passed upon their mutual relation. He was mortal no more. Once He had belonged with them to the same world of mortality; but now He had passed through the grave. He was come back into this world of change, Himself to suffer no more. He was the visible embodiment of the world beyond the grave. He came back to them in sudden and uncertain visitations, in Jerusalem and in Galilee, to teach them that His presence is universal, and shall always be with us unto the world's end. He was preparing them for their work of faith, for the universal preaching of the kingdom in all lands. He was training them to believe in His perpetual nearness, in all the earth, in busy cities, in the lonely wilderness, in the throng of men—to believe in His real and abiding presence in His Church, on which all mysteries of grace are founded.

II. And see next how gently He dealt with them. As He said before He suffered, "I have many things

to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now ;” so He dealt with them after His resurrection. He came and mingled with their earthly every-day life. He was with them in the upper chamber, by the way-side, on the borders of the sea. When Peter said, “I go a-fishing,” it was not the disciples alone who said, “We also go with thee;” He “went with them,” though they knew it not. When He came to them, He hailed them with the same words of common life as while He was yet with them. “Children, have ye any meat?” “Cast on the right side—ye shall find.” “Come and dine.” He taught them by tokens, and not by sight. He repeated the miraculous draught of fishes — that which once before made Peter fall down before Him, and say, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” It was a miracle full of significance—full of thoughts of His past words to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then, when they were come to shore, he wrought again once more another miracle full of old remembrances. “They saw a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread,” and “He cometh and taketh bread,” an action they had already seen again and again—in the wilderness, in the upper chamber, and at Emmaus. Now all this was manifestly done that they might realize His presence by inward consciousness, and by the interpretation of expressive tokens. He did not in plain words say, “It is I;” but He did things which none but He had done or could do, leading their hearts to expound to themselves in secret who it was with

Whom they were conversing, and in Whose presence they were gathered together.

III. Another thing to be here noted is how slowly and how imperfectly they knew Him. At first not at all. They heard a voice hailing them from the shore; the same voice which thrilled through Mary at the tomb; which afterwards had said unto them all, "Peace be unto you." And yet they knew it not. They thought, perhaps, that it was some one who would purchase of their labour, some dweller in the coasts of Tiberias. It was by a miracle that they were wakened up to know Him; and then, only one at first had a heart keen to see that it could be none but He: and that one who saw first, was John, who had lain upon His breast at supper. Even then when all were gathered round Him, they sat wondering. It seems as if there were upon them a spell, so that they might see and yet not see, know and yet not know Him. "No man durst ask Him Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord." Even then, when face to face, the awe of His presence was upon them, and seemed to conceal Him from their perfect recognition. This is deeply expressive of the reality of His presence. He was so really with them that the active powers of sight and speech were for a while suspended; and yet they were full of an overpowering consciousness that He was there. He was too near them to be curiously or deliberately scanned. The senses of the body were transposed into the soul. They saw Him, knew Him, felt Him in their inmost spirit, in a way higher than the con-

ditions of sense, which were still unsatisfied, though they were more than fulfilled by His actual and visible fellowship.

Now in this we have set before us, as in a parable, certain great laws of His kingdom, the relation of this world with the world to come; and our personal relation to Him, and His dealings with us.

It teaches us first,—

1. That a perception of His presence within us is the very life of faith. What was visibly true with the disciples on the Sea of Tiberias, is really, though invisibly true, of the whole Church throughout the earth. We are upon the waters of this troublesome world, He upon the eternal shore. The Church is toiling not far from the land of everlasting life. And yet though so near, as it were two hundred cubits, we still see dimly; we still but faintly and uncertainly perceive Him standing on the shore; that is, we neither know His voice, nor recognize His form, in the manifold course and changes of this mortal life. We are so intent on the aim and labours of the world; so entangled in its visible causes and operations; so insensible of His presence; that when He calls to us we know not that it is Jesus. For instance, how common it is to see people, otherwise considerate and right-minded, wholly leave the thought of His presence and will out of all the habitual acts and calculations of their life. I do not mean that they neglect to pray, or to worship Him, to confess Him in the Creeds, and by the visible Communion of the holy Sacrament; but that their

daily life, with all its undertakings, aims, failures, successes, is governed and computed upon a theory, commonly called experience, reason, common sense, and the like, which, in fact and true interpretation, means all that is wise and prudent, apart from the presence and will of our Lord. This one thing we leave out; and this one thing wanting makes all things else to be worse than vain. To take a particular case:—How often men wear themselves out in long and laborious exertions to make a fortune, to lay the foundations of earthly happiness, or to gain, it may be, even a simple and bare sustenance. They toil, and seem never to attain. They go a-fishing, and take nothing. They forget that the disciples took nothing till Jesus stood upon the shore. All was weariness and emptiness till He was present in their ventures—till He said, “Cast the net on the right side.” So men of this world cast all night long on the wrong side, by their own discretion, and take no spoil. This is the true secret of worldliness and disappointment: their life has little faith, because their faith has little perception of His presence.

And this is specially true in higher things, that is, in a life of religion. As men of a worldly mind thrust the presence of Christ out of the world, so shallow and external Christians shut His presence even out of the Church. They practically deal with the Church as if it were a human institution and convenient polity, framed by the wisdom of pious men for the promotion of religious order. The

sacraments of the Church they reverence, as expressive symbols of religious thoughts and duties,—the objects of lively feelings and grave intentions: and so in the whole circle of religious obligations, and the whole sphere of their religious life. It is upright, intelligent, and commendable, but the one central thought, the one governing and sustaining reality, an habitual consciousness of the presence of Christ, is wanting. This is the reason why so many toil on, always in the night—in an habitual darkness of mind; heaving to and fro, unstable, full of fear, taking nothing—making little or no advances; gathering in empty nets, and casting them again in vain:—weary in prayer, distracted in self-examination, vacant and cold even at the blessed sacrament of His most intimate union with us. Their religion is either external or intellectual. Their thoughts terminate upon the acts or solemnities of worship, or the recitation of prayers, the reading of words, or the performance of familiar usages; or their minds rest upon mere thoughts and conceptions of the imagination. Their faith has no life, energy, or fruitfulness, because it is not centred in the reality of His spiritual presence.

To take one more example, without an habitual consciousness of the nearness and will of Christ, all His merciful providence is thwarted. Apart from His intention, human sorrows are fearful and overwhelming. I do not mean only at the time of visitation, but both in foreboding and in retrospect. The affliction of sickness, bereavement, and anguish

of heart endured alone, and without a sense of Christ's presence or purpose in afflicting, are almost beyond the strength of man. They often either engender insanity, or bring on great moral aberrations. I am not speaking of those, be it remembered, who wrestle in rebellion against the will of God. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker; let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." When sorrows light upon the soul without awakening it to be conscious that Christ is standing near, the whole foundation of the spiritual being must be out of course. This is self-evident. But I am speaking now of those who see Him, though they see Him dimly, who know Him by the tokens of His power, and in the time of visitation feel His presence, but live from day to day without this abiding consciousness. When it awakes it lasts only for a season, and is a transient and not an habitual state. If such persons could only believe how deeply they afflict themselves: how they sharpen every point and make rough every edge of sorrow. The only true exposition of His will when He stands revealed to us in the hour of visitation, is a daily sense of His nearness in all our life. All things are then from Him, in Him, and for Him: all things are in a context, of which His will is the perpetual interpretation: the whole current of our life is an expression of His controlling hand; and in all its changes and callings are the accents of His voice. We may even forecast what is to come to us hereafter. "I need this or that too much to be long overlooked by one so

loving and so watchful. He sees my failures and my necessities; and will visit me in the morning. His will is my will: and what He wills for me I will for myself. Whatsoever come it is that without which my will must be crossed, and my great hope for eternal life disappointed,—be it even pain, sickness, solitude,—if they come, I then know they are what I need; when come, I know that without them I should not have reached the eternal shore. ‘His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge his floor.’ He is now winnowing me.” This, then, is one great lesson we may learn, namely, that the sense, and sustained consciousness of His presence, will, and disposing power is the life of faith, and the true rest of our spiritual being.

2. The other truth we may learn from this is, that the way to have this perception is to be like Him; and that the measure of this perception varies with the measure of our likeness to Him. Every man in his own order: John saw Him first, because He was before all in love: but all saw Him afterwards, because all were obedient. So, now, they see Him most clearly in all the events of life who love Him most; and yet to all who are faithful He reveals Himself. “He that hath my words and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him*.” All through life He is making Himself more fully

* St. John xiv. 21.

known; revealing Himself in His providence, and in the administration of His grace to each one severally. All the earthly life of faithful Christians from childhood or from their repentance, is a gradual and a growing perception of His presence and love. It is their true rest, peace, and solace. This is the measure by which we may ascertain our advance towards His kingdom. The one great spiritual fact is, Christ with us, and in us. The more we are like to Him, the more we shall be conscious of it, for this is a perception of the heart rather than a conviction of the understanding. Kindred minds interpret each other by a silent sympathy. So it is between true Christians, and their Lord.

The first and necessary means to this sense of His nearness to us is obedience. A will at variance with His will repels Him from us, and makes a wide moral estrangement, a great gulph between Him and us. This is the first thing we have to make sure, that our will is united to His will. The next great means—which, indeed, is but the last named in its highest expression—is a life of devotion. What is prayer, meditation, and communion with Him, but the utterance and affection of a heart that is knit to Him by the powers of a loving will? And what is this but obedience? And this leads on all who persevere in devotion to imitate His life of charity. This is the third or great means of living in Him. Love humbles, cleanses, and enlightens our souls. It is by love even in the lowliest form that we ascend to the vision of God. “He that loveth not knoweth

not God." "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The more we are quickened and filled with the loving sympathy and tender compassion of our Lord, the more we shall perceive Him about us on every side. All our life through, we shall more and more clearly understand His words:—"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father." "The time shall come when thou shalt touch me, not as in Bethany, not by holding my feet, or by washing them with tears, but by the touch of soul and spirit, of life and substance, of reality, and eternal truth: thou shalt be bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, spirit of my spirit." Obedience, devotion, and love—these three make all things full of His presence: all day long, in all hours, trials, labours, anxieties, probations, even more and more fully revealed till we shall see Him as He is; till our "eyes behold the King in His beauty," in the morning of the world to come, standing upon the eternal shore, when the net hath been drawn to land, and the great multitude, whom "no man can number," shall be gathered from the one imperishable Church, the net which cannot be broken, into the kingdom of the Resurrection.

But I must now hasten to the duty laid on me to-day. I am bidden to ask your alms in support of the Foundling Hospital. And it is on no motives lower than the highest, that I can urge you to assist in this charitable work. I ask your alms, then, for the love of Christ, and of souls for whom Christ died.

At first sight, the nature of the Foundling Hospital may be so far misunderstood, as to be regarded with a doubtful approval, or even with positive censure. Facts in its past history and management, which none are so frank to publish and condemn as are the Governors of the Hospital, may give an apparent colour to such objections. It has, for instance, been sometimes imagined, that institutions which relieve sin of its penal consequences, tend to encourage its commission; and that to make provision for the miserable offspring of transgression hardens the heart and blunts the consciences of transgressors.

Now, I have not been insensible of the apparent force of these objections; but after full consideration, we may be completely satisfied, both on general principles and on particular reasons, that the Foundling Hospital is beyond their reach.

As a general principle, it is enough to answer that the whole dispensation of God's love in Christ is founded upon the gracious law of averting the penal consequences of sin. The objection, if true, smites the Gospel itself.

Next, this Hospital offers no relief from the sufferings of sin, except on the Divine condition of repentance.

And although it does not receive within its walls the unhappy mothers of its foster-children, nevertheless, in offering relief, it offers also the means of personal restoration to a life of purity. They are thereby brought within the cognizance of the Governors; a relation is opened between them

and a spiritual pastor ; their character and conduct are subjects of care and observation. In proof of this it must be said, that a large proportion—it is said two-thirds of the mothers whose children have been received into this Hospital—have been, so far as the discernment of man can penetrate, reclaimed to an amended life. This Institution, therefore, has a twofold object—the penitence of the mother, and the preservation of the guiltless children from the world of evil into which their mother's sin had sunk them. It thereby cuts the lineage and tradition of evil. And who can conceive, or conceiving dare to utter, what are the sights and sounds with which their first infancy becomes familiar,—what corruption on every side,—what powers of all but inevitable contagion crowd upon them even in their mother's home? The multiplication of sin into itself, and the aggravated intensity of evil, are fearful spiritual facts surrounding their earliest childhood. How great a work of mercy, to translate them from the harbour and haunt of sin into a home where all is sacred to purity and to God. These, then, are the main objects of the Foundling Hospital. And does not the life of our blessed Master set forth these two works of mercy as objects of His special care? Was it not a woman that had been a sinner whom He suffered to kiss His feet?—to whom also He shewed Himself first after He was risen from the dead? Did He make scrutiny whose offspring they were when He took up the little children “in His arms and blessed them?” Was it only those hap-

pier little ones on whom no sin but the common heritage of Adam rests, whose "angels do always behold the face of their Father which is in Heaven?"

On all the general principles, therefore, involved in this Institution, it may be confidently said, that they are wise, merciful, compassionate, and drawn from the very words and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the particular reasons which show the safety and excellence of this House of mercy, a few words must suffice. It must be remembered that, of those for whose recovery it is intended, many have been the deceived and feeble, though still sinful, prey of fraud and systematic falsehood; and some of the guiltier number, when their eyes are opened too late upon the horror of irreparable misery, are struck to the soul with a deep and life-long remorse. It is beyond all imagination to conceive the anguish of sin abhorred too late. Once done it is irrevocable. Like death, sin has no remedy but the power of Christ. It may be abolished; it cannot be undone.

That there are such awakened and remorseful sinners, in multitudes far beyond the compass of this and many such Institutions, is known to all whose duty it is to walk through the darkness which broods upon the guilty around our unconscious dwellings. And if it be thought dangerous to couple pecuniary or other help with the warnings of repentance, let it be remembered, that destitution is one of the most active causes of guilt, hardness,

and despair. The only point to be made sure in administering such a charity, is, a due discernment in selecting the objects of its care.

From an examination of the rules by which the Governors conduct their proceedings, it appears that caution is carried to its fullest extent, and discernment exercised in as large a measure as is permitted to our infirm judgment. The chief points especially tested are three,—namely, the previous good character, the present destitution, and the sincere repentance of the mother. These are tested by all the means within human ken. Beyond this, none but He whose “eyes are as a flame of fire” can penetrate.

Being men, we have but the simple choice either to show mercy on probable conditions of repentance, or to show no mercy at all.

Let those who dare, choose the latter. For us, let us remember Who hath said, “He shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy*.” Let us beware of a hard incredulity feigning to be wise. The Only-Wise hath commanded us to be “merciful even as our Father which is in heaven is merciful;” “who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust†.”

I cannot leave this subject without referring to the unhappy children for whom this House is opened. If Christ be still in this world a sojourner, and a

* St. James ii. 13.

† St. Matt. v. 45.

stranger; and if in receiving strangers we receive our Lord; who is more like the stranger, in whom we receive Himself, than the miserable, unconscious child, the outlaw of nature, whose being is a breach in the kingdom of God; a stranger, indeed, in the order, sanctity, and rule of the new creation of the world, redeemed from sin and death? These hapless outcasts are here received, fostered, educated, and instructed in the law of the Divine will; adopted into the family of the Regeneration; naturalized and brought into harmony with the creation of God. The Church is their true and legitimate mother, and their Father is in heaven. There is something greater than human benevolence in the restitution and healing of wrongs like theirs. It is the will and the grace of Him who sitteth "upon the throne and saith, Behold I make all things new."

To proceed with the scheme of this Institution. Up to the age of fourteen or fifteen, the children are under the immediate care of the Hospital, either here or elsewhere: at that age they are placed in service or apprenticeship. After their term of apprenticeship is over, they are still related to this, their only true home and earthly patrimony; and the well-deserving receive aids and rewards, according to the discretion and means of the Charity, from a separate fund, wisely formed for that purpose, distinct from the ordinary income of the Hospital. At this moment no less than five hundred children are within its shelter and care.

With these words I will make an end. You,

that have been blessed and kept; for whom life is full of the pure blessings of home and of affection; be pitiful as you are largely favoured. For all the mercies of nature and of the Spirit—for the love of Christ, here present, and looking upon your intentions and your works,—gather His lambs, albeit scattered and lost, nay, wilful in their wandering, wilful, above all, gather the unconscious sufferers through sin not their own. Let the free grace of God in the regeneration of us children of wrath be the motive and the measure of your gratitude and of your compassion. Give of your substance not to-day only, but hereafter. This work is no isolated effort, but a dispensation of charity ever ministering, and, therefore, ever claiming your continual alms. When you make your last accounts with this world, remember Christ's little ones, and make them joint heirs with your own posterity. Count it a blessing to give for such a work: the benediction of those who are ready to perish shall be upon you. What more would you ask for your reward?

He is on the shore, and we shall soon be at the land. Never till then will you see the reward of your toil. If, when the net is drawn up, there be one penitent, or one innocent gathered in by your alms and intercessions, you will not have lived in vain. Be this your desire and aim, your frequent and fervent prayer.

